

Mid-South Plant News

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center

Coffeeville, MS



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Staff Changes

Paul Rodrigue, who held the position of PMC Manager, accepted a position with the NRCS Project Engineer Office in Grenada, MS.

Dr. Sherry Surrette, who held the position as State Plant Materials Specialist, accepted a position with the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson, MS.

It was a pleasure to work with these two individuals and we wish them all the best on their new career pursuits.

Kentucky Gamagrass Seed Producer Visits MSPMC



Mr. Jimmy May, a 'Highlander' Eastern Gamagrass seed producer from Auburn, Kentucky, paid a visit to the PMC back in July.

As a retired wildlife biologist from the KY Department of Fish & Wildlife, Mr. May has an invested interest in this native grass and became the first commercial grower of 'Highlander' after the center released it in 2003.

Since that time, Mr. May has benefited greatly from the technical assistance he has received from the Plant Materials Program and has implemented most of what he has learned from the center, especially cost analysis and fertility information. His production has steadily increased to .25 acres over the last couple of years.

Mr. May is very optimistic about the future of native grasses, especially the role 'Highlander' will play in the cattle and forage community. He plans to continue moving forward with 'Highlander' seed production to meet the increasing demand. Also, Mr. May is considering adding a variety of switchgrass to his seed production sometime in the near future.

For more information about 'Highlander' please visit:

<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/mspmcpg6132.pdf>

MSPMC Partners With Local High School Students to Provide Career Training for Students

During the summer of 2007, the PMC had an opportunity to take part in a great program with the Coffeeville High School. Jobs for Mississippi Graduation, Inc. has been available since 1991 and provides job training and leadership skills to eligible high school students during the summer months.

Jakirio Horton and Ken Bland, who both are recent graduates, spent part of their summer at our facility assisting with various projects. These hard-working students were a tremendous help to us, especially in preparing for the Wildflower Tour and a Demo project at the Yalobusha County Multi-Purpose facility. Jakirio and Ken have both enlisted in the military.

We wish to thank Mrs. Mary Johnson, Job Specialist, Coffeeville High School for the opportunity to work with her in preparing these students for their future career goals.



40-Year-Old Release Finds Renewed Demand

'Chiwapa' Japanese millet, an MSPMC release from the 1960's, is experiencing a significant resurgence in popularity these days.

Chiwapa was originally released as a forage. In addition to its forage potential, the high seed yield and the seeds' low decomposition rate in saturated soils also make it an excellent choice for waterfowl plantings.

Another attribute is its 120-day maturity. This allows for earlier plantings in June that can benefit from spring/early summer rains. This gives an advantage over 60-day and 80-day varieties: in order for seed head maturity to coincide with waterfowl season, these faster maturing varieties would normally be planted in August. However, the typically dry conditions of late summer can significantly reduce chances of successful stand establishment.

Chiwapa has caught the attention of landowners, researchers, biologists, and seed producers interested in enhancing waterfowl habitat. Dr. Rick Kaminski, wildlife biology professor at Mississippi State University, points out the robust stalk resists lodging. He is also impressed with its great reseeding ability.

Keith Watson, a landowner in the MS Delta commented on the tremendous amount of seed yield he witnessed even through a late summer drought. Keith had planted Chiwapa as part of a waterfowl enhancement project on his land.

Wayne Gordon, Area Manager at the Trim Cane Wildlife Management Area in Oktibbeha Co., MS has also witnessed the phenomenal reseeding ability of Chiwapa in their waterfowl impoundments. Gordon intends to plant additional acreage in Chiwapa, thus maintaining high-quality moist soil habitat for some of the best waterfowl hunting in the state.

The 2007 growing season opened the door for the MSPMC to address the demand of commercial seed growers for Chiwapa seed. Working with Fred Poindexter, a farmer and landowner in the Delta, we planted a small production field that was land leveled and could be flooded.



After achieving a successful stand, weed and insect control applications were made, N applied, and a shallow flood was established.

We have always wanted to see Chiwapa grown for seed production in a "rice-type" practice setting to observe any advantages. For the rest of the growing season, the production field looked little different than other seed crops we had grown in the past. The flooding did delay maturity to some degree as the crop went close to 140 days before maturing.

Once the combine entered the field for harvest, we realized we were seeing an unbelievable seed crop. In earlier years, seed yield averages of 1500-1800 lbs/acre were reached and became expected. After a very dry season, we only harvested around 600 lbs/acre. The 2007 production field yielded over 2500 lbs/acre (exact yields will be known after seed cleaning is finished).

We gained a lot of insight in this one crop of Chiwapa seed production. It will be interesting to see if those yields remain as commercial growers receive their seed and put into place what we observed this past season.



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Native Plant Spotlight



Devilwood *Osmanthus americanus*

Devilwood is a small, evergreen tree native to the Southeast that is naturally found in moist to dry habitats including stream banks, stable dunes, maritime woods and pinelands. It can reach up to 40 ft, but is commonly found at 15ft to 20ft with a spread of 10 – 15 feet. It prefers partial shade but can tolerate full sun exposure.

Its wood is very hard to split, hence the name “devilwood” and it is primarily used for ornamental purposes. This tree is relatively pest free and would be an excellent choice to use in a mixed shrub border or naturalized setting.

One of this tree’s greatest attributes is the incredibly fragrant flowers produced in early spring. By fall, fleshy, blue fruits (drupes) develop and remain attached to the tree through the winter months. Birds and small mammals often relish this food source till the next spring.

MSPMC Active Releases

- ‘Halifax’ Maidencane
- ‘Chiwapa’ Japanese Millet
- ‘Highlander’ Eastern Gama Grass
- Hopefield Selection Trailing Wildbean
- Indian Bayou Source Powdery Thalia
- Lark Selection Partridge Pea
- Leaf River Source Wool Grass
- Leflore Source Creeping Burhead
- ‘Meechee’ Arrowleaf Clover
- ‘Quail Haven’ Reseeding Soybean
- Morton Germplasm Shrub Willow

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